

## IN THE CLAIMS

1. (canceled)

2. (currently amended) A method of screening for therapeutic agents useful in the treatment of a disease selected from the group consisting of ~~cardiovascular diseases,~~ dermatological diseases, endocrinological diseases, metabolic diseases, ~~cancer,~~ gastroenterological diseases, muscle-skeleton diseases, neurological diseases, respiratory diseases, inflammation and urological diseases in a mammal, comprising the steps of:

i) determining activity of a NPEPPS polypeptide comprising the amino acid sequence SEQ ID NO:2 at a ~~certain first~~ concentration of a test compound ~~or in the absence of said test compound, and~~

ii) determining the activity of said polypeptide at a second ~~different~~ concentration of said test compound; and

iii) identifying the test compound as useful in the treatment of the disease if it regulates the activity of the NPEPPS polypeptide.

3-23. (canceled)

24. (new) A method of screening for therapeutic agents useful in the treatment of a disease selected from the group consisting of dermatological diseases, endocrinological diseases, metabolic diseases, gastroenterological diseases, muscle-skeleton diseases, neurological diseases, respiratory diseases, inflammation, and urological diseases in a mammal, comprising the steps of:

i) determining activity of a NPEPPS polypeptide comprising the amino acid sequence SEQ ID NO:2 in the absence of said test compound,

ii) determining the activity of said polypeptide in the presence of said test compound; and

iii) identifying the test compound as useful in the treatment of the disease if it regulates the activity of the NPEPPS polypeptide.